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*The Sustainable Competitive Positional Advantage of
English Dailies
A study for the State of Tamilnadu (India)*

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The Sustainable Competitive Positional Advantage of English Dailies

A study for the State of Tamilnadu (India)

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1. Introduction

A theory of sustainable competitive positional advantage has been proposed as an important tool to identify the sustainable competitive position of products and services in the consumers' minds. It is observed that there are more than twenty English Dailies brands available at the National and State level in India. The present study is made with the conceptual and research propositions postulated by Bharadwaj *et al* (1993). It takes place in the State of Tamilnadu (India).

This study draws perceptual maps of English Dailies top of mind brands based on cost leadership and differentiation dimensions. Besides, it has been based on a new marketing scale (Selvarasu and Kathiravan, 2007). There are nine variables that are adopted from McCauley and Nesbitt (2004): *Motivators, Inhibitors, Personality, News Content, Advertisement Content, Innovation, Quality and Service Excellence*. They are used to describe competitive advantage of English Dailies. All these variables of English Dailies have been redefined using four variables of sustainability, as follows: *rare, valuable, inimitable and non-substitute* (Barney, 1991 and Coyne, 1986). The overall scores for SCPA have been computed at three level as low score, medium score and high score of English Dailies in accordance with approach of Competitive advantage as cost leadership, differentiation and focus (Porter, 1985).

English Dailies publishers strive for a competitive advantage as that of many other firms but few truly understand how to achieve and sustain the position in the market. According to Porter, (1985) competitive advantage (CA) has been gained by offering three different generic strategies viz., *cost leadership, differentiation and focus*. A firm utilizing a cost leadership strategy seeks to be the low-cost producer relative to its competitors. A differentiation strategy requires that the firm possesses a "non-price" attribute that distinguishes the firm as superior to its peers. Firms following a focus approach direct their attention to narrow product lines, buyer segments or geographic markets. "Focused" firms use cost or differentiation to gain advantage, but only within a narrow target market. In order to maintain leadership in the competition, a company wants the gap between perceived value and cost of the product to be greater than the competition. The competitive advantages have been obtained by providing the customers with a value differentiation: *product differentiation, service differentiation, image differentiation, quality differentiation and innovation*.

According to Barney (1991) and Coyne (1986), a firm is said to have a "sustainable" competitive advantage when its competitors are unable to duplicate the benefits of the firm's strategy. In order for a firm to attain a "sustainable" competitive advantage, its generic strategy has been grounded in an attribute that meets four criteria: *valuable*, *rare*, *inimitable* and *non-substitutable*. The first one '*valuable*' means that the newspaper has value to the reader. The second one '*rare*' indicates that it is not either available in common or easily obtained. The third one '*inimitable*' means that it cannot be easily imitated or copied by competitors. The last one '*non-substitutable*' means that consumers cannot or will not substitute another product or attribute for the one providing the firm with competitive advantage.

Shoasck's (1987) has indicated various positioning alternatives of sustainable competitive advantage as *reduced divergence* (a standardized, cost-efficient service) *increased divergence* (greater customization for specific segments) and *increased complexity* (addition of services tiding toward a multi-service 'poison') as differentiation possibilities. Each of these 'poisoning' alternatives results in differences in customer's perception of value which lead to shift in customers from one competitor to other competitor.

The researchers propose the study by way of combining Competitive Positional Advantage and Sustainability of Competitive Advantage as "*Sustainable Competitive Positional Advantage* (SCPA)" (Selvarasu and Kathiravan, 2007) in line with the conceptual and research propositions postulated by Bharadwaj *et al* (1993).

2. Research Problem

A new theory of sustainable competitive positional advantage has been proposed as a tool for redesigning strategies to position in a competitive market. In order to verify this theory, one of the growing sectors, print media has been selected. It is important to understand the application of SCPA from its basic level of competition on a routine basis rather than seasonal or intermittent marketing events. In this direction English Dailies have been selected as one of the basic and routine level of market. Tamilnadu as one of the states in India, has been identified for the purpose of study. It represents a diverse readership and convergence in various forms of English Dailies. Therefore, Sustainable

competitive positional advantage of English Dailies in Tamilnadu is set as the research problem.

3. Need for the study

English Dailies have occupied above 38.3 percent out of the total publishers of newspapers and periodicals. It is inferred that more than 50 percent of the circulation is held by 2 percent of the publishers in the form of English Dailies. Researchers have identified the area of concern in terms of circulation and the number of publishers. It is important to note that the competitive advantage of publishers of English Dailies have evinced interest in the circulation and other related features of newspaper. The study has been attempted to verify the level of competitive positional advantage and the extent of sustainability. As there is research gap identified in the review of various literatures researchers have attempted to verify the sustainable competitive positional advantage as one of the new marketing theory categorized under market competition. The concept of sustainable competitive positional advantage is studied as an emerging area of research in the field of English Dailies.

4. Research objectives

For the purpose describing the sustainable competitive positional advantage of National Dailies as one of the best form of print media, the following objectives have been proposed as primary and secondary objectives.

a. Primary Objective

The primary objective of study is to identify the sustainable competitive positional advantage of various English Dailies in relation to cost leaderships (price) and differentiations (Motivators, Inhibitors, Personality, News Content, Advertisement Content, Innovation, Quality, and Service Excellent) based on the existing profile of readers in Tamilnadu.

b. Secondary Objectives

In line with the primary objective, the secondary objectives proposed by the researchers are as follows:

- To describe the sustainable competitive positional advantage of English Dailies due to cost leadership and differentiation based

on demographics (Age, Gender, Religion, Marital status, Occupation, Education, Income, members of the family, type of house)

- To explore the sustainable competitive positional advantage of English Dailies due to cost leadership and differentiation based on psychographics (values and Lifestyles)
- To indicate the sustainable competitive positional advantage due to cost leadership and differentiation among English Dailies based on reading activity, interest and opinion (reading time, hours, page, look, access, pleasure and language preference)
- To draw perceptual maps of top of mind brands of English Dailies based on two dimensions of SCPA as cost leadership and differentiation.

5. English Dailies and its Market Competition - Area of study

National English Dailies in print and online form provide Indian and International news on hourly and daily basis. In India, there are seventeen various form of English newspapers prevailing such as English Daily Newspaper, English Newspaper Online, Times English Newspaper, Indian English Newspaper etc. In the ambit of Indian information media, the growth of print media has been reported around 12.93 percent in the last year. It is observed that there are about twenty English Dailies brands available at the National and State level in different proportions.

In the context of registered number of print media as newspaper and periodicals in India, English language shares about 9,064 out of 62,423 registered newspapers which are about 14.5 percent in the year 2006 according to the office of Registrar of Newspapers for India. It is evident that there are about 2,130 numbers of dailies being published in the country which has been reported by RNI for the year 2005-06. It is surprising to note that in total only 3.4 percent of registered publishers apply with submission of statement of accounts among all the registered publishers. In case of English Dailies, about 201 publishers which are about 2.2 Percent of total registered

English publishers have furnished statement of account for the year 2006. The registered publishers, who have furnished their statement of accounts, have claimed a circulation of 88.86 million copies for the year 2006. In the same direction, publishers of English Dailies have claimed the circulation of about 34.1million copies in the year 2006.

According to Indian Readership Survey, the circulation of top ten dailies has been reported as 40.2 million in the year 2008. The leading brands of English Dailies at the National level are *Times of India*, *Hindustan Times*, *The Hindu*, *The Telegraph*, *Deccan Chronicle*, *The Economic Times*, *The New Indian Express*, *Mid-day*, *Mumbai Mirror* and *DNA*. Among the top ten dailies, the circulation of Times of India has been reported with a maximum of 13.6 million out of 40.2 million which is about 34%. The Hindustan Times has a circulation of 6.3 million which is about 16% among the key English Dailies. In the Third place, The Hindu with around 5.6 million circulations has been reported which is about 14% among the top of ten English Dailies.

6. Review of Literature

The extensive collection of literature on the topic of study is presented for competitive advantage, competitive positional advantage, sustainable competitive advantage and sustainable competitive positional advantage.

Alderson (1965) considers the base for differential advantage as *technological*, *legal*, and *geographical*. The research has suggested four strategies for achieving differential advantage are *segmentation*, *selective appeals*, *transaction*, and *differentiation*. Hall (1980) states that successful companies achieve either the lowest cost or the most differentiated position. Henderson (1983) states the unique advantages of one firm over competitors are those who adopt either the best or the fastest gain as an advantage over competitors. Porter (1985) introduces the idea of the "*value chain*" as the basic tool for analyzing the sources of competitive advantage (CA).

According to Trout and Ries (1969, 1981), positioning is not what you do to a product, Positioning is what you do to the mind of the prospect. Positioning is the technique in which marketers try to create an image or identity for a product, brand, or company in the perception of the target market. It is expressed relative to the position of competitors. Typical positioning tools include *graphical perception mapping*, market surveys, and certain statistical techniques.

Moon (2005) has introduced three variations of positioning strategies used to break free from Product Life Cycle thinking. He has proposed three positioning strategies namely *Reverse*, *Breakaway* and *Stealth Positioning*. Competitive positional advantage referred in marketing management text and cases in three bases as *functional*, *Symbolic* and *Experiential*. The '*functional*' base of competitive positional advantage has been established by providing solution to the problem and *benefits* to the customers. The second base of CPA as '*symbolic*' has been established by *self image*, *Ego identity*, *belongingness and social meaningfulness and affective fulfillment*. The third and last base of CPA, '*Experiential*' has been positioned by way of providing sensory and cognitive stimulation.

Coyne (1986) gives explanation of the conditions needed for an SCA to exist as idea of capability gaps. Ghemawat (1986) discusses about advantages that tend to be sustainable as size in the targeted market, superior access to resources or customers, and restrictions on competitors' options. Day and Wensley (1988) state that Asset Stock Potential sources of advantage are superior skills and superior resources in assessing ways to achieve SCA from both competitor and customer perspectives. Dierickx and Cool (1988) have stated that sustainability is based on *substitution and imitation*. Prahalad and Hamel (1989) said that SCA results from *core competencies* and firms consolidate *resources and skills* into competencies quickly to changing opportunities.

Bharadwaj *et al.* (1993) have proposed a concept of sustainability in competitive positional advantage. The concepts such as *differentiation advantage* and *cost advantage* have been focused as a measure of long term performance with reinvestments in resource and skills Barney (1991) and Coyne (1986) have explored four essential requirements as *valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable and no substitute*.

7. Research gap

It is identified that there is a gap in the concept of competitive advantage in the form of combining Sustainable competitive advantage and competitive positional advantage. It is termed as theory of 'Sustainable Competitive Positional Advantage (SCPA).

8. Methodology

This section of the research report contains a frame work of all the stages of research from research problem to the scope of the research. The presentation about the research propositions, design of research, sampling method, sample size, SCPA marketing scale, statistical tools, data collection, limitations and scope of the study. The description of all the aspects of methodology has been presented in the following section.

a. Research Propositions

Top ten English Dailies have been considered for the study in the direction of sustainability and its competitive positional advantage. English Dailies have been verified with two dimensions of sustainable competitive positional advantage viz., cost leadership and differentiation. The cost leadership of English Dailies is determined with five variables. The first variable is about price of English Dailies (CPA) which is redefined based on variables represent sustainability (SCA). In case of second dimension the variables used to determine brand and product differentiation using eight variables to determine competitive positional advantage based on variables to depict the sustainability. The researchers have proposed the following proposition to verify SCPA of English Dailies.

***P1:** SCPA Score of all English Dailies do not vary with demographics, psychographic and lifestyle of newspaper readers.*

In a given situation, any English Dailies is expected to have higher SCPA based on its circulation. The above proposition has been used to verify SCPA of English Dailies in terms of average score against the circulation of English Dailies in a given market.

In the existing market situation, profile of readers of English Dailies certainly vary with demographics, psychographics and interest the researchers have proposed the following second proposition to examine the association of SCPA against the profile of reader.

***P2:** SCPA of English Dailies is not significantly influenced by the demographic, psychographic, reading behavior profile of Newspaper readers.*

English Dailies have been describe from the perspective of sustainability of competitive positional advantage as against demographic (Age, Gender, Religion, Marital status, Occupation, Education, Income, members of the family, type of house)

Psychographic (values and Lifestyles) and reading behaviour (reading time, hours, page, look, access, pleasure and language preference) of readers. An important attribute or key of SCPA has been predicted using discriminate function. The researchers have proposed the following third proposition as the predictive discriminate score of SCPA using cost leadership in relation to other attributes of differentiation in competitive positional advantages

P3: The score of SCPA for English Dailies is proportionately vary with its coefficients of SCPA dimension

The discriminate score and its co-efficient of all the nine attributes have been used to reflect images of English Dailies. All the possible to dimensional image map have been describe essentially an image map of cost and differentiation has been drawn.

b. Research Design

A research design specifies the methods and procedures for conducting the research work. According to Kerlinger (1983), research design is the plan, structure and strategy of investigation conceived so as to obtain answers for research questions.

The present study is descriptive in nature and it describes sustainable competitive positional advantage (SCPA) of English Dailies as competitive positional Advantage and sustainable competitive positional advantage. The survey has been conducted in TamilNadu which is one of southern states of India. The study has been designed based on a marketing scale developed by Selvarasu and Kathiravan (2007). The dimension of competitive positional advantage (Porter, 1985) and dimension of sustainable competitive advantage (Barney 1991, Coyne 1986) have been combined in order to formulate a new theory of sustainable competitive positional advantage. There are nine variables have been adopted from McCauley and Nesbitt (2004) (*Motivators, Inhibitors, Personality, News Content, Advertisement Content, Innovation, Quality, and Service Excellent*) to describe competitive advantage of English Dailies. Four variables of sustainability namely Rare, valuable, inimitable and Non-substitute have been adopted form Barney (1991) and Coyne (1986). Other descriptive variables have been identified based on three set of classifying variables namely demographic, psychographics and reading behaviour. The study area has been randomly selected based on multi-stage sampling and distributed in the state of Tamilnadu.

c. Description of SCPA Marketing Scale

The scale has been prepared, tested and validated by Selvarasu and Kathiravan (2007). The scale comprises of nine variables for competitive positional advantage based on variables to indicate position of sustainable competitive advantage. All these variables have been used to describe two dimensions of SCPA, the first dimension has been adopted as cost leadership competitive positional advantage. The response for the variable under competitive positional advantage has been recorded with the seven intervals as semantic differentials from a strong cost leadership of cheap price to a weak cost leadership of expensive price. A maximum score of seven has been given to a favorable response towards cheap price and a minimum score of one has been assigned for an expensive price the sustainable competitive advantage of cost leadership has been studied with a response from agreement to disagreement. All the four variants of sustainability namely rare, valuable, inimitable, non-substitutable have been recorded with a minimum score of one for disagreement response and a maximum score of five for agreement response and three for Neutral response.

The second dimension of SCPA has been studied with Eight variables representing differentiation has an attribute for SCPA. The first four variables are namely, price, motivator's agreement, inhibitors agreement and personality. The responses for the entire four variables have been recorded in the form of one disagreement response five for agreement response and three for Neutral response.

Fifth and sixth variables of differentiation are News content, Advertisement content and innovation have been collected in the form of most important to least important the responses have been coded with the minimum of one for least important and a maximum of five for most important and three for neutral responses

The seventh and Eighth variable quality and service excellent have been rated from a favorable response of excellent to unfavorable responses of bad. A maximum score of five has been assigned for the excellent. The response of minimum score of one for "bad" response and the score of three neutral responses

The overall scores for SCPA has been computed at three level as low score (45 – 99), Medium score (100 - 144) and the high score (145 - 243). The reference key for SCPA due to cost leadership has been grouped as low score (5 -13), medium score (14 -

17) and a high score (18 - 27). The other dimension of SCPA due to attributes of differentiation has been referred with cumulative score as low score (40 – 86) medium score (87 - 127) and high score (128 -216). All the Eight attribute of differentiation and the sustainable competitive positional advantage has been verified independently with a low score (5- 13), medium score (14 – 17) and high score (18 - 27) as that of Cost leadership. English Dailies have been rated based on the scores obtained for SCPA under the three different categories. Each of the categories has been set to distinguish the level of sustainable competition in English Dailies based on its own score of SCPA. The English Dailies which has a lowest score of SCPA has been inferred that the top of mind Brand has Low sustainable competitive positional Advantage. On the contrary English Dailies which is having highest score of SCPA has been reported as having high level of sustainable competitive positional advantage. Any English Dailies which is having medium score of SCPA has been referred as having a moderate SCPA. The scale also has three sections to identify the profile of readers based on demographics (Age, Gender, Religion, Marital Status, Occupation, Education, Income, family dependents, house type) Psychographics (Thinkers, Believers, Achievers, Strivers, Experiencers, Makers, Innovators, Survivors) and reading activities interest and opinion (reading time, hours, page, look, access, pleasure and language preference). The scale has a section to verify top of the mind English Dailies, Hard share and market share. The description of variables used under the competitive positional advantage and sustainable competitive advantage has been presented in the following section.

d. Pilot Study

The scale developed by Selvarasu and Kathiravan (2007) was used to study the sustainable competitive positional advantage (SCPA) of English Dailies with two sections as one for competitive positional advantage (CPA) and Sustainable competitive advantage (SCA). There are nine attributes maintained in the questionnaire under two dimensions of SCPA. The responses for competitive positional advantage have been defined in bipolar semantic differential scale type and the sustainability of CA has been defined in the form of Likert's type, importance scale and rating scale.

The field of application has been tested in Newspaper sector of the print media. The study area has been identified as one of the state provinces of India, viz., Tamilnadu. The pilot study has been carried out in Chidambaram town which is coming under the B3

category of Socio-Economic Class in two phases. The first phase has been carried out during the working days to meet the respondent and seek the responses. The second phase of field study as pilot exercise has been carried out on holidays. In the first phase around 75 respondents approached and around 60 responses have been used for reliability study using Cronbach's Alpha test. The results of the study have been verified and it was found to be favourable for bipolar scale with 0.69 alpha co-efficients which is expressing the competitive positional advantage part of SCPA. The sustainability part of SCPA where the items have been adhered to Likert's scale type, importance scale and rating scale type of questions, the result has been found below 0.33 alpha co-efficient.

Researchers have discussed with the select group of respondents as to how comfortable it is to answer the questions during the survey for them. The respondents have expressed that the construct of the language does not reflect the regional orientation in terms of English language expression. In order to make the respondents comfortable in answering the questions, the construct of the language have been revised to suit the state of Tamilnadu, India. The real reason for the toughness of language is due to the process of adapting the items from Readership survey, USA. Researchers have taken necessary care to revise and simplify the usage of items in the construct.

In the second phase of Pilot study, researchers have distributed the survey as per the actual sampling plan in all the five districts of Tamilnadu about 15 respondents in each district to a total of 75. The responses collected after the field survey has reflected the easy and quick access to the items used in the questionnaire. In line with the reliability study carried out after the first phase of study, similar test have been done using statistical software package. The results of test have indicated that out of two dimensions used, differentiation has the reliability score of 0.65 alpha co-efficient in the form of bipolar semantic differential scale and cost leadership has 0.045. In the case of items coded with Likert's type scale, the reliability score is 0.551 alpha co-efficient, for importance scale, it is 0.39 alpha co-efficient and for rating scale items, 0.47 have been computed.

9. Main Study

The study is based on multistage sampling method using state level districts as group and agents as clusters. The simple random sampling method of statistical probability sampling of "lottery method" has been adhered in the third stage of

identifying sample respondents. In Tamilnadu, among the thirty districts, researchers have selected five districts such as Chennai, Madurai, Trichy, Virudhunagar, Cuddalore. During the process of preparing a sample frame, from those five districts, based on the socio-economic classification one town under the class of A1, B1, C1, D and E researchers have collected the list of subscriber from Agents of all English Dailies. The list has been prepared using the monthly ledger given by agents of the respective five towns.

a. Sampling Method

In order to establish the probability simple random sampling a lottery method of lucky draw has been used. The researchers have personally drawn 220 draws to identify the ID no. of subscribers the representative sample respondent have been contacted by field investigator under the supervision of agent as well as researchers. In total 1100 respondents have been personally contacted to get a sample size of 1000. In every town, around three hundred subscribers in each district, the researchers have distributed the questionnaire. For the purpose of the study out of all the filled questionnaires, 220 questionnaires have been used for further analysis.

b. Sample size

The researchers have used the following formula to obtain the desired size of sample Scheaffer, Mendenhall and Ott (2005).

The sample size is decided using the formula based on normal distribution

$$n \geq \frac{N\sigma^2}{(N-1)D + \sigma^2}$$

$$D = \frac{(\text{Margin of Error})^2}{z_{\alpha/2}^2}$$

Where, n-sample size, z-standard normal variate (1.9645), N- Circulation of English Dailies in Tamilnadu (25,00,000), e- Accepted error(0.10), and σ -Standard deviation (1.607) of the key variable based on the respondents approached in the pilot study, Tamilnadu during 2005. The margin of Error value is 'D' (0.0026). The calculated

sample size is equal to 993 (Approx.1000) which is above the prescribed large sample size of 30 numbers. Hence, the total sample size of 1000 numbers has been maintained by the researchers throughout the study. In order to have variation within the sample area (State), among five sample units (districts) have been identified and a proportion of 200 samples in each districts have been maintained.

c. Statistical Tools

The researchers have adopted relevant statistical tool for analyzing data describing SCPA, CPA and SCA. The following are the relevant tools such as, ANOVA, cross tabulation, chi-square correlation, discriminant Analysis/ Multidimensional scaling (MDS), and Factor Analysis and cluster analysis.

10. Limitations of the Study

The present investigation, though carried out on scientific lines, suffers from the following limitations. The study is made for a specific period only and not continuously for all periods. However the above limitations in no way affect the validity of the findings of the study. The advantage of local language in dailies has been found to be a limitation as there are changing lifestyles and literacy towards westernized culture having a base of English language.

11. Conclusions

An attempt has been made to ascertain the sustainable competitive positional advantages of the English Dailies in Tamilnadu. The special focus of the study is to evaluate two dimensions of competitive positional advantage in the form of cost leadership and differentiation. All the results of the study have been examined from three different perspectives of English newspaper readers. In addition, the top of the mind brand has been compared with the sustainable competitive positional advantage. The comparison has been done to explore the possibilities of establishing sustainability of English Dailies in the long-run. This proposal has been studied in various other sectors after identifying the variables of competitive advantage.

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